



TRINIDAD & TOBAGO UNIFIED TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

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Guidelines to Members Working from Home during the "COVID-19 Pandemic"

PREAMBLE

The world is facing an unprecedented crisis in the form of COVID-19 pandemic with the priority being to save lives. One of the extraordinary initiatives taken to preserve life was the closure of schools effective March, 13, 2020. Thereafter, many teachers sought to voluntarily engage their students remotely using their personal technological devices. The Ministry of Education followed and made available its School Learning Management System (SLMS) to assist with online teaching and learning. The infusion of technology into the teaching and learning process is inevitable and welcomed. Members are encouraged to voluntarily engage in remote teaching using the Ministry of Education's platform and any other remote or online method of their choosing during this COVID-19 period. As a progressive organization charged with the responsibility of safeguarding the interests of educators, TTUTA has developed these guidelines in the face of a shifting educational and social landscape.

STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

These guidelines are developed in an effort to ensure that teachers' rights are not infringed as the Government shapes its pandemic response and to safeguard teachers from litigation while protecting the rights of the child to education.

GUIDELINES FOR MEMBERS

1. CONTRACTUAL GUIDE

- (a) Members are advised that online engagement during this Covid-19 Pandemic is voluntary.
- (b) No teacher shall be coerced into online engagement by the employer or its agents, any denominational board, its agents or employees, any Parent Representative Body or Parent
- (c) No teacher shall receive a negative Annual Staff Report during the period while schools are closed.
- (d) No member is liable for students who are unable to participate in remote learning and/or personally liable if they are unable to facilitate online engagement.

2. COMMUNICATION

- (a) Members must manage the expectations of parents by using clear and respectful communication.

- (b) Parents should be reminded that while all efforts are being made to offer some online engagement to students during this stay at home, it is impossible to provide normal school online at this time.
- (c) Parents must also be reminded that communication related to online engagement shall take place at mutually agreed times, and that feedback may not be immediate since many teachers are also expected to balance their work/home life challenges during this period.
- (d) Seek written parental consent via email or messaging in order to communicate with students via online platforms. If possible, members may create a shareable Google form for parents to indicate written consent.
- (e) Members are asked to communicate any social and legal concerns regarding students' welfare to the relevant support officer, whether Principal, Vice Principal, Social Worker, Children's Authority, Police, Guidance Officer etc. If in doubt please contact your TTUTA representative for advice.
- (f) Members shall have access to contact information for Support Services Personnel.
- (g) Members are encouraged to make themselves available to their employer for reasonable communication during regular working hours.
- (h) Teachers are reminded to follow the existing approved communication protocols during this period, including but not limited to communication protocols for grievances. During online engagement, teachers have the right to determine who, apart from their students, are allowed into their virtual space.

- (i) It is important that teachers keep the lines of communication open with their Principal, Vice Principal and Middle Management while engaging students online during this COVID-19 Pandemic to collaborate when necessary, and to maintain professional trust and dialogue. However, members are not required to submit daily or weekly records of work, including schemes of work or notes of lessons.

3. **PROFESSIONALISM**

- (a) Notwithstanding the limitations, members are asked to plan what they want to deliver, evaluate work, and provide feedback to their students on work submitted.
- (b) Teachers must ensure as far as possible that the space used for their online engagement is quiet, well lit, and free from distractions.
- (c) In the event that video instruction is used, whether synchronous or asynchronous, teachers must be appropriately attired and should use a suitable background, preferably a solid wall.
- (d) Members shall be guided by the Laws, Regulations, Codes of Conduct and Ethics to which they are accustomed in the Teaching Service.
- (e) Teachers are to be courteous to colleagues, students and others when engaging in online teaching and communication.
- (f) Teachers are encouraged to keep a log of the work taught and an attendance roster as this will facilitate an easier transition when school is eventually reopened.

4. **REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS**

- (a) It is not recommended that teachers and students should spend more than 270 minutes (4.5 hrs) per day using a screen for instruction; synchronous learning should also be limited to 120 minutes (2hrs) maximum per day. The amount of synchronous time for each teacher will depend on the level being taught.

The table below offers recommendations as to how much time students should spend in synchronous instruction per day.

Level	Recommended synchronous screen time per day
ECCE	00 minutes
Infants 1&2	20 minutes
Standards 1&2	30 minutes
Standard 3	40 minutes
Standards 4&5	60 minutes
Forms 1, 2 & 3	90 minutes (3 sessions @ 30 minutes)
Forms 4 ,5 &6	120 minutes (4 sessions @ 30 minutes)

**** It is recommended that there should be a break of at least 20 minutes between sessions.***

5. SAFETY/SECURITY

- (a) Teachers shall take all reasonable steps to ensure that their workspace is safe.
- (b) Teachers are advised to use the device provided by the employer for work purposes only. They are also encouraged to install a Virtual Private Network (VPN) and avoid using open unfamiliar WIFI connections in an effort to make the experience more secure. (Where a personal device is being utilized a (VPN is strongly suggested).
- (c) All reasonable steps shall be taken by the employer, teachers and parents to ensure that the virtual space is safe from intrusion.
- (d) Teachers, parents and administrators shall work together to ensure that the time students are required to spend is unlikely to be harmful to them, given their age, special needs and/or any environmental conditions to which they may be subjected.
- (e) Any one on one session e.g. pastoral care meeting shall be risk assessed and approved by the school's leadership. Teachers must be aware of the safety measures to take if they are having a one on one communication with a child.
- (f) Teachers shall be aware of copyright and or issues related to plagiarism when using material shared online.
- (g) Teachers and students shall not be recorded by anyone without their knowledge and permission.
- (h) Teachers shall be extremely cautious and operate as if nothing shared online is private.

6. WORK-LIFE BALANCE

- (a) Teachers are advised to ensure that a healthy work-life balance is achieved and maintained during these “Covid-19 times”. Most teachers already continue to work long after the school day is over. The danger is that this will be exacerbated in the absence of physical boundaries between home and school. Take steps to prevent this from happening.
- (b) School Supervisors, Administrators, Heads of Departments, Deans, Curriculum Officers, Guidance Officers and Social Workers who perform some of their duties from home, including responding to official communication shall do so during normal working hours.
- (c) The Association encourages teachers to engage students online using the medium, online platform and method of their choosing.

7. TEACHERS CODE OF ETHICS

The TTUTA Teachers’ Code of Ethics shall be honoured within the virtual teaching space. Members are reminded of the following:

- (a) Fees shall not be charged by or paid to any public officer for voluntarily engaging students online in this COVID-19 Period during regular school hours
- (b) No fees shall be charged or paid to any government/ government-assisted school for the conduct of virtual classes in this COVID-19 Period during regular school hours.

8. FURTHER ADVICE

- (a) Should any member be concerned that the principles outlined here are not being sufficiently applied, they should raise the matter in the first instance where possible with their Head of Department/Principal, and with the Staff Representative and/or the TTUTA leadership thereafter as necessary.
- (b) During these “COVID-19 times” school supervisors, principals, and middle managers who volunteer to participate in online learning should relate to those under their charge in a supportive rather than demanding manner.
- (c) If any public officer feels isolated, depressed or emotionally overwhelmed in any way they should seek help immediately. Help may be from friends, religious leaders or the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).

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